DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 428 164 UD 032 844

TITLE	Covenant House Texas, 1996-97. Research Report on an Educational Program.
INSTITUTION	Houston Independent School District, TX. Dept. of Research and Accountability.
PUB DATE	1997-00-00
NOTE	11p.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Evaluative (142) -- Tests/Questionnaires (160)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Compensatory Education; *Disadvantaged Youth; Elementary Secondary Education; *Homeless People; Program Evaluation; *Student Attitudes; Urban Schools; *Urban Youth
IDENTIFIERS	*Houston Independent School District TX

ABSTRACT

Covenant House Texas (CHT) is a nonprofit corporation that provides emergency shelter and related services for children and youth in crisis situations. The Texas Education Agency requires an annual evaluation of all programs receiving state compensatory education funds, and the On-Site School program of CHT was evaluated under this provision. The On-Site school program allows students who cannot attend their home schools to continue their schooling while at the CHT center. The On-Site school served a total of 53 students in the 1996-97 school year. Overall, students had positive perceptions of the program. Although enrollment dropped since the program no longer served youth in custody, the percentage of students staying longer in the program and the numbers of juniors and seniors rose. The classroom was filled to capacity, and students and the teacher noted the need for additional space. Among the difficulties experienced by the program was a lack of communication with the student's home school, causing problems in student transfers in and out of the program. An appendix contains the student survey. (Contains four tables.) (SLD)

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ED 428 164

RESEARCH

Report on an Educational Program

Department of Research and Accountability

Covenant House Texas

1996–97

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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Executive Summary

Covenant House Texas
1996–97

Program Description

Covenant House Texas (CHT) is a nonprofit corporation established in 1983 which provides emergency shelter and related services for children and youth in crisis situations. Many of the clients at CHT are runaways or homeless youth. Children are also placed at CHT by Child Protective Services. During its first year of operation, CHT served nearly 2,000 children and youths. Since that time, CHT has continued to expand its services to include medical and legal assistance, substance abuse counseling, vocational counseling, educational services, and pastoral guidance.

CHT encourages and assists every youth in furthering his or her education. By state law, those children in the adolescent group (ages 10–11) are considered to be minors and must be enrolled in school. Whenever possible, every effort is made for the student to attend his or her home school. For those youth who can not attend their home school or are not enrolled in school, CHT established the On-Site School program in 1986 to enable these students to continue their education. In 1991, the On-Site School at CHT became fully accredited with the Houston Independent School District (HISD). Because the program adheres to HISD requirements, students are credited with having been in attendance in school while at the center and receive a course grade for their work there. The goal of the On-Site School program is to insure that the students continue to make progress in their school work.

CHT was allocated compensatory education funds from the district in the amount of $36,500 for the 1996–97 school year.

The staff for the On-Site School program includes a full-time certified secondary teacher. The teacher holds a Master's degree and is also a certified reading specialist. The residential advisors, who are a part of the staff at CHT, are there to help meet the basic needs of the youth. They provide 24 hour supervision for the children at CHT and are present in the classroom when school is in session. Each residential advisor has at least a high school diploma and two years experience working with children.

The Texas Education Agency requires an annual evaluation of all programs receiving state Compensatory Education funds. The purpose of this evaluation is to describe the On-Site School program at Covenant House Texas and evaluate its effectiveness as a compensatory education program. The following research questions were addressed:

1. What instructional services were offered at CHT?
2. What were the demographic and enrollment characteristics of the students served by the On-Site School program at CHT? How did this population of students change over time?
3. What were the students' perceptions of the On-Site School program?
4. What were the teacher's and the CHT program director's perceptions of the On-Site School program?

Findings

- Overall, the students' perceptions of the program were positive. Of the few weaknesses cited by the teacher and director, the primary one was the limited classroom space.

- Student enrollment at the On-Site School dropped from the last evaluation year, 1993–94, as the school no longer serves custody youth. However, the percentage of students staying longer in the program, as well as the percentage of juniors and seniors, increased.

- Personnel at some HISD schools, as well as schools in other districts, were not accepting the

CHT parent consent form for withdrawal from the home school and transfer to the On-Site School for various reasons. In addition, many HISD school counselors were not contacting the CHT staff for a report on the student's progress while at CHT.

- The teacher has made plans to implement an accelerated instructional program for the high school students.

Recommendations

1. Despite lower enrollment, the current classroom is filled to capacity. Therefore, a new classroom should remain under consideration. Another adult, either a tutor or instructor, will be needed in the new classroom. More computers in the new classroom would also allow the teacher to give more individual attention to students. However, instruction which allows for extended use of the computer on higher level activities will be needed.

2. It is suggested that Alternative District administrators develop an enforceable policy to facilitate HISD student transfer to the On-Site School. When a student enrolls at the On-Site School, administrative procedures, such as having a parent present or payment of fines, should be waived. Such unnecessary administrative delays violate the student's entitlement to free public education and result in the loss of funding.

3. A system should be established to facilitate communication between the On-Site School and other schools. Alternative District administrators should work with CHT staff to ensure that student records regarding academic progress accompany the student when returning to the home school or transferring to another HISD school.

4. Given the transient nature of this student population, it is recommended that the On-Site School curriculum be based on an accelerated instructional program. Such a curriculum is to be piloted at the high school level in the coming year. If it is successful, this curriculum program should be expanded to the elementary and middle school levels.

5. Increases in the percentage of junior and senior high school students need to be monitored over the next few years for the purpose of coordinating with HISD high school personnel and faculty in order to ensure that CHT students graduate on time.

COVENANT HOUSE TEXAS
1996–97

Purpose: *The purpose of this evaluation report is to describe the Covenant House Texas (CHT) On-Site School program and evaluate its effectiveness as a compensatory education program.*

Design: *Descriptive*

Population: *Runaway and homeless youth, age 10 to 17.*

Methods: *Students participated in a survey about perceptions of the school program. The teacher and director took part in separate structured interviews. Two classroom observations were conducted, as well.*

Findings: *Overall, the students' perceptions of the program were positive. Of the few weaknesses cited by the teacher and director, the primary one was the limited classroom space. Personnel at some HISD schools, as well as schools in other districts, were not accepting the CHT parent consent form for withdrawal from the home school and transfer to the On-Site School for various reasons.*

Conclusions: *Personnel in HISD schools and schools in the surrounding area need to be made aware of procedures in the matters of withdrawal and transfer, and student counseling for students who enroll at the On-Site School. Increases in the percentage of junior and senior high school students need to be monitored over the next few years for the purposes of coordinating with HISD high school personnel and faculty in order to ensure that CHT students graduate on time.*

Introduction

Program Description

Covenant House Texas (CHT) is a nonprofit corporation established in 1983 which provides emergency shelter and related services for children and youth in crisis situations. Many of the clients at CHT are runaways or homeless youth. Children are also placed at CHT by Child Protective Services. During its first year of operation, CHT served nearly 2,000 children and youths. Since that time, CHT has continued to expand its services to include medical and legal assistance, substance abuse counseling, vocational counseling, educational services, and pastoral guidance.

CHT is committed to serving the "suffering children of the street, and to protect and safeguard all children." This mission is the basis of the Five Covenant Principles which govern how CHT operates. These principles are:

1. Immediacy — providing for the basic needs of children immediately;
2. Sanctuary — providing children with a safe and protective environment;
3. Value Communication — teaching children that caring relationships are based on trust, respect, and honesty;
4. Structure — providing children with a structured environment; and
5. Choice — encouraging children to make serious choices about their future.

The services provided by CHT are based on the age of the child as well as the specific needs of that child. Clients are placed into one of three groups: the adolescent group, which consists of children ages 10 to 17; the older youth group for those ages 18 to 20;

and the pregnant teens, or teenage mothers with children. For the adolescent group, the primary goal of the center is to reunite the youth with his/her family or assist with residential placement. For the other youth, the program at CHT is geared toward independent living with an emphasis on obtaining employment and saving money.

CHT encourages and assists every youth in furthering his or her education. By state law, those children in the adolescent group are considered to be minors and must be enrolled in school. Whenever possible, every effort is made for the student to attend his or her home school. For those youth who can not attend their home school or are not enrolled in school, CHT established the On-Site School program in 1986 to enable these students to continue their education. In 1991, the On-Site School at CHT became fully accredited with the Houston Independent School District (HISD). Because the program adheres to HISD requirements, students are credited with having been in attendance in school while at the center and receive a course grade for their work there. The goal of the On-Site School program is to insure that the students continue to make progress in their school work.

Program Funding and Source

CHT was allocated compensatory education funds from the district in the amount of $36,500 for the 1996–97 school year.

Program Staff

The staff for the On-Site School program includes a full-time certified secondary teacher. The teacher holds a Master's degree and is also a certified reading specialist. The residential advisors, who are a part of the staff at CHT, are there to help meet the basic needs of the youth. They provide 24 hour supervision for the children at CHT and are present in the classroom when school is in session. Each residential advisor has at least a high school diploma and two years experience working with children.

Purpose of the Evaluation Report

The Texas Education Agency requires an annual evaluation of all programs receiving state Compensatory Education funds. The purpose of this evaluation is to describe the On-Site School program at Covenant House Texas and evaluate its effectiveness as a compensatory education program. The following research questions were addressed:

1. What instructional services were offered at CHT?
2. What were the demographic and enrollment characteristics of the students served by the On-Site School program at CHT? How did this population of students change over time?
3. What were the students' perceptions of the On-Site School program?
4. What were the teacher's and the CHT program director's perceptions of the On-Site School program?

Methods

Data Collection and Analysis

Information regarding the On-Site School at CHT and the general services provided at CHT were collected through a series of site visits to the center and interviews with the classroom teacher and CHT program director. Demographic and enrollment data were collected from HISD Community Services records as well as those records kept by the teacher. Descriptive statistics were employed in the analysis of the student demographic and enrollment data. When possible, data were compared to the findings from the last evaluation conducted in 1993–1994.

Students were given a survey about their perceptions of the On-Site School. For the purpose of confidentiality and to discourage repeated responses by the same subjects, the researcher stayed in the classroom while the students finished their surveys and collected the surveys when they were done. Student responses were coded and tabulated.

Results

What instructional services were offered at CHT?

The On-Site School program was in session weekdays from 8:30 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. Several courses were offered: English, mathematics, history, and science, and two periods a week for health and two periods a week for fine arts. Four days of the week, the students attended an elective class. Students had P.E. Monday through Thursday. On Fridays, students were provided with enrichment activities such as a field trip to the museum. Instruction was individualized to meet the needs of the students. When possible, whole group lessons were employed. Group instruction was usually provided when the majority of students were high school students. Younger stu-

dents received more individualized instruction.

The competency-based curriculum was grounded in the state's essential elements. The teacher had developed a set of workbooks for each subject area (e.g., pre-algebra, algebra). Each workbook contained a pre-test and a set of worksheets. The Wide Range Achievement Test (WRAT) was administered to each student upon entrance into the program. The teacher also worked with the student on an individual basis to obtain any available information regarding the student's previous schooling. Information from the WRAT as well as grade level information provided by the student, allowed the teacher to make a preliminary placement decision. The teacher had a wide range of texts and software available in the classroom. The students accessed these materials during class then returned them at the end of the period. Students completed worksheets and answered questions in the textbook. This seatwork allowed the instructor to monitor each student's progress on a daily basis to determine if a student needed further remediation or could move forward to extension activities. Students were exempt from the TAAS while in residence since they were in crisis; however, instruction was given to prepare students for the test and some students actually took the exam.

What were the demographic and enrollment characteristics of the students served by the On-Site School Program at CHT? How did this population of students change over time?

The On-Site school served a total of 53 students during the 1996–97 school year. Information comparing the demographic characteristics of the students who attended the On-Site School in 1993–94 and 1996–97 is presented in **Tables 1** and **2**.

Table 1: Number and Percentage of Enrollment by Ethnicity, 1993–94 and 1996–97

	1993-94		1996-97	
Group	n	%	n	%
African American	55	36.9	22	41.5
Hispanic	28	18.8	14	26.4
White	64	43.0	17	32.1
Other	2	1.3	0	0.0
Total Enrollment	149		53	

Of the 53 students, 41.5 % were African American, 26.4% were Hispanic and 32.1% were white. Students of other ethnic backgrounds did not enroll at the On-Site School in 1996–97.

In the comparison, it was found that the percentage of white students enrolled in the program decreased from 43.0% in 1993–94 to 32.1% in 1996–97. The African American and Hispanic enrollment increased from 36.9 % to 41.5% and 18.8% to 26.4%, respectively. The increase in Hispanic enrollment was surprising to the program director because Hispanic students typically have been referred to other shelters, such as AAMA (Association for the Advancement of Mexican Americans).

Table 2: Number and Percentage of Enrollment by Gender, 1993–94 and 1996–97

	1993-94		1996-97	
Group	n	%	n	%
Male	83	55.7	18	34.0
Female	66	44.3	35	66.0
Total Enrollment	149		53	

One interesting finding with regard to gender was that the percentage of males enrolled dropped from 55.7% in 1993–94 to 34% in 1996–97. The female population increased accordingly. Another important finding was the reduction in overall enrollment from 149 to 53, a 64% decrease. The program director attributes the decrease in male and overall enrollment to the fact that the On-Site school no longer serves custody youth.

Table 3 presents a comparison of the duration of students' stay in the program.

Table 3: Number and Percentage of Enrollment by Days Present, 1993–94 and 1996–97

	1993-94		1996-97	
Number of days	n	%	n	%
1-2 days	8	5.4	1	1.9
3-9 days	43	28.9	10	18.9
10-29 days	66	44.3	21	39.6
30 days or more	32	21.5	21	39.6

Compared to 1993–94, the percentage of students enrolled at the On-Site school for more than 30 days increased in 1996–97 compared to 1993–94. Almost 20% of the students were enrolled for more

than 90 days in 1996–97. Therefore, the percentage of students staying longer increased from 1993–94.

Table 4 compares the enrollment of the students by grade for 1993–94 and 1996–97.

Table 4: Enrollment by Grade, 1993–94 and 1996–97

	1993-94		1996-97	
Grade	n	%	n	%
5th	1	0.7	1	1.9
6th	7	4.7	4	7.5
7th	21	14.1	3	5.7
8th	20	13.4	8	15.1
9th	60	40.3	22	41.5
10th	28	18.8	6	11.3
11th	11	7.4	7	13.2
12th	1	0.7	2	3.8

Just as in 1993–94, the majority of the students were in high school (69.8%). The distribution of students in eighth grade and below shifted with considerably fewer students in the seventh grade in 1996–97. The bulk of students were in the ninth grade which was similar to the 1993–94 finding. Typically, juniors and seniors who are living at Covenant House are advised to attend other HISD campuses in order that they may get credit for required courses for graduation. Nevertheless, eleventh and twelfth graders comprised 17% of students attending the On-Site School, which was a substantial increase from 1993–94.

What were the student perceptions of the On-Site School program?

Students who were enrolled at the On-Site School during the months of April and May, 1997, completed a survey. The purpose of the survey was to gauge students' perceptions of the On-Site School. Overall, 23 students, 43% of the students enrolled at the On-Site School in 1996–97, completed the survey. A copy of the 1996–97 Covenant House Texas Student Survey with the response rate for each item can be found in the Appendix.

There was general agreement (74%) among the students that they thought they were doing better in their schoolwork at the On-Site School than at their former school. The majority of the students (over 60%) also considered that the classes were better, the schoolwork was more interesting, and that it was easier to concentrate at the On-Site School than at their old school. While over half (56%) of the students agreed that the teacher and staff were more understanding of their needs than the teachers at their previous school, there was a strong contingent of students (44%) who did not agree with this statement.

Students were asked to explain one new skill or idea that they had learned while attending the On-Site School. Answers ranged from the general, "math" and "reading," to the specific, "factoring polynomials" and "multiplying by two and three digits" and "organizing my work."

What were the instructor's and program director's perceptions of the On-Site School program?

According to the teacher, the challenge with this group of students is not so much academic as it is attitudinal. The teacher must work on the students' self-confidence to bring them, as she said, from the point of "I can't do" to "I can do." She explained that many students have not had positive relationships with their teachers, therefore, much of what she does is to break down barriers to learning by establishing a good working relationship with them. This was evidenced during the two observations held in her classroom. New students were present at these observations, and the instructor's approach to the new students, as well as all of the students, was firm yet friendly. The teacher immediately put forth the expectation that the students can and will do the work they have been assigned.

To maintain discipline and motivation in the classroom, a point system was implemented which rewards students for proper conduct. Some of the possible rewards include extended curfews, snacks, and removal of certain chores. Students can also lose privileges and be given extra duties for misconduct. The program director speculated that perhaps the reason some students thought that the teacher and staff were not very sensitive to their needs is because many of the students coming to CHT are not used to structure and discipline.

The teacher still considers the limited classroom space to be a problem, however, she has been creative with her use of space. Shelving along one wall was installed which provided more floor space for a few more desks. When asked what the instructor

would do with more space, she explained that she would have more computers and she would rotate the students by assigning several students to the computers at the same time while she worked with a smaller group of students on other assignments. This would allow her to give more attention to individual students.

Another problem that the teacher faced was the lack of communication with the home school or receiving school that the student enrolls in after leaving CHT. For example, one student with a hearing problem had not received any special instruction prior to coming to CHT, and the CHT teacher spent much effort to guarantee that the student would get the services he needed at the receiving school. Such time and effort would not have been necessary if the receiving school couselor had contacted the CHT teacher as soon as the student transferred. The teacher and staff are interested in helping the student make a smooth transition at the receiving school. However, communication between CHT and the receiving school is only possible if the receiving school cooperates.

In a related matter, it was made apparent during data collection for this report that the withdrawal process at some home schools continues to be problematic. This was an issue in 1993–94 and it has not been resolved satisfactorily because withdrawal of some students in the last year was delayed for various reasons such as that the parent had to be physically present at the former school to withdraw a student who was entering CHT. In some cases, withdrawal was denied because the student owed the home school textbooks or library books. According to the program director, CHT has established procedures which allow for the facsimile transmission (fax) of parent permission for withdrawal from the former school that do not require the parent to be present at the former school. Most schools have cooperated with CHT, but personnel at some schools are either unaware of the procedure or refuse to cooperate.

As for instruction, the teacher is interested in implementing an accelerated instructional program on the high school level. Such a program is suitable for transient students because it allows them to resume their education immediately upon entering the school. Moreover, the teacher considers this program to be motivational because it allows the students to know exactly what is expected of them to get credit and pace themselves accordingly. An accelerated program also would be beneficial in that juniors and seniors could obtain many of the credits needed for graduation. Another advantage of this program is that it would release the teacher from planning detailed lesson plans for high school students because the objectives, instructional materials and activities are built into the lessons of the program. With the time saved, the teacher could focus on instructional strategies and special activities which go beyond the accelerated instructional program.

Finally, the director considered the computer technology that the students were using to be of high quality. The CHT director regarded the teacher as one of the On-Site School's greatest strengths, but she saw the need for a tutor, as the teacher needs assistance and the director would like the students to have more individualized attention during and after class. As for the problem of classroom space, the director said that she expected that more classroom space may become available once a building belonging to CHT is reconstructed.

Discussion

While the news of a new classroom is encouraging, the addition of another classroom poses more challenges. A new classroom with more computers, as the teacher discussed, almost certainly would require another instructor or tutor, not only for the safety of the students, but also to make their work on the computer more meaningful (i.e., not just skills practice). For example, students could write essays and reports using word processing software, and learn to use the Internet as a resource.

Because the majority of students enrolled are in high school, and an increasing proportion of those are juniors and seniors, the teacher will be piloting an accelerated instructional program during the 1997–98 school year. Should the program be successful, she will find a similar program or adapt the current one for the younger students. This instructional program coupled with the new classroom should effect positive changes on the On-Site School curriculum and instruction.

Monitoring the number of juniors and seniors is recommended over the next few years. If an increase in this segment of the population should continue, emphasis will have to be placed on getting students in a position to graduate. This implies the involvement of HISD high school faculty and personnel, working with the CHT teacher and staff to ensure that students

could earn the needed credits to graduate.

Greater cooperation from the home school personnel on matters concerning withdrawal and transfers is needed to insure continuity in education and that Average Daily Attendance (ADA) funds are not lost. Withdrawal should not be contingent upon the parent's physical presence at the home school or the return of school property when an accepted procedure for withdrawal is in place.

Once a student leaves CHT, it is very difficult to know where he or she has gone. Therefore, follow-up procedures on the part of the CHT staff could be facilitated with the counselor of the receiving school taking responsibility for contacting the CHT staff to notify them of the student's transfer and transition to the receiving school, as well as to obtain information about the student's progress while at CHT.

In conclusion, the teacher and staff are making a concerted effort to continue the students' education while they are in crisis and absent from the home school. Better awareness of the Covenant House Texas On-Site School and the needs of homeless and runaway youth on the part of HISD schools and those schools outside of the district is critical to the success of this program.

Recommendations

1. Despite lower enrollment, the current classroom is filled to capacity. Therefore, a new classroom should remain under consideration. Another adult, either a tutor or instructor, will be needed in the new classroom. More computers in the new classroom would also allow the teacher to give more individual attention to students. However, instruction which allows for extended use of the computer on higher level activities will be needed.

2. It is suggested that Alternative District administrators develop an enforceable policy to facilitate HISD student transfer to the On-Site School. When a student enrolls at the Covenant House On-Site School, administrative procedures, such as having a parent present or payment of fines, should be waived. Such unnecessary administrative delays violate the student's entitlement to free public education and result in the loss of funding.

3. A system should be established to facilitate communication between the On-Site School and other schools. Alternative District administrators should work with CHT staff to ensure that student records regarding academic progress accompany the student when returning to the home school or transferring to another HISD school.

4. Given the transient nature of this student population, it is recommended that the On-Site School curriculum be based on an accelerated instructional program. Such a curriculum is to be piloted at the high school level in the coming year. If it is successful, this curriculum program should be expanded to the elementary and middle school levels.

5. Increases in the percentage of junior and senior high school students need to be monitored over the next few years for the purpose of coordinating with HISD high school personnel and faculty in order to ensure that CHT students graduate on time.

APPENDIX

Covenant House Texas 1996-97

Student Survey

The purpose of this survey is to obtain students' perceptions of the On-Site School and any recommendations to better serve the students enrolled in the school. The response rate, based on the number of students enrolled in the program, was 100%.

1. What grade are you in this year (1996-97)? Circle one.

   5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12

Please mark the boxes to tell us how much you agree/disagree with each statement.

	Strongly Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Slightly Agree	Strongly Agree
2. I like the Covenant House classes better than the classes at my other school.	30%	4%	35%	30%
3. My schoolwork at Covenant House is interesting most of the time.	22%	17%	35%	26%
4. It is easier to concentrate on my schoolwork at Covenant House than it was at my other school.	26%	9%	26%	39%
5. I am doing better in school at Covenant House than I did at my old school.	17%	9%	22%	52%
6. The Covenant House teachers and staff are more understanding of my needs than were the teachers at my other school.	22%	22%	17%	39%

7. What is one new thing that you learned while at Covenant House?

8. What is the biggest difference between the Covenant House school and your other school?

9. If you could change one thing about the academic program at Covenant House, what would that be?

10. When your stay at Covenant House is over, what do you plan to do? (What goals do you have for the future?)

11. What have you gotten out of the Covenant House school that you think you can use in the future?

Thank you for your cooperation.